

The Grand Hotel

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CHAPTER ONE

As Elizabeth parked her car in the guest drive of the Englin Hotel, she noticed that the canopy over the bank of revolving doors was beginning to fray at the edges. The cream-colored trim on the deep maroon was suffering from the weather. She made a mental note to mention it to the maintenance department.

The doorman, in his maroon livery, let a smile cross his usually impassive face as he opened her car door. “It’s good to see you back, Mrs. Englin,” he said cheerfully.

Elizabeth reached for her handbag and stepped out of the car, her skirt sliding up elegant long legs. “Henry, I’ve only been gone since Friday,” she chided.

“It seems longer,” he said. “Shall I have the boys park your car and bring up your bags?”

“Please.” She handed him the keys to the dark-green Porsche. “Everything running smoothly?” The person she should have addressed the question to was the assistant manager on duty, but Henry had been at the Englin as long as Elizabeth could remember. The assistant manager might be the proper person to answer the question, but Henry had the feel of the great hotel. If anything was not running smoothly, Henry always knew it.

“There have been a few snags. Nothing major.” Henry motioned to a bellboy.

Elizabeth smiled and went on into the hotel lobby.

She stood on the stylized “E” woven into the center of the maroon carpet under the silver chandelier and took a deep breath. The air held the faint fragrance that she had always associated with the Englin — a mixture of furniture wax, wood smoke, and freshly ground coffee, mixed with a multitude of other scents Elizabeth had never been able to isolate. Again today, as she had throughout her five years as general manager of the hotel, she gave up, and ruefully shook her head as she walked through the lobby to the registration desk.

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At the assistant manager's desk, a dark-haired young woman in the tailored maroon jacket of a hotel manager looked up with a blinding smile. "Welcome home, Mrs. Englin," she said.

"Hi, Jill. Are you on duty this weekend?"

"No, I have one more week of training left. Mr. Bradford is on duty. He's up in one of the penthouse suites taking care of details: it was rented this afternoon."

Elizabeth noted with interest the way Jill said her supervisor's name. So she thought Tom Bradford was pretty special, did she? Well, he *was* an unusual person; that was why he was Elizabeth's chief assistant. "Whenever he's free, tell him I'm back. I'll be in my apartment the rest of the day if there's anything important."

Tom Bradford was good at his job; he was certainly as capable as she of catering to almost any of the people who rented the Englin's penthouse suites.

"It wasn't the President of the United States, was it?" she asked Jill, almost as an afterthought.

Jill grinned. "No. At least, there aren't any Secret Service men around."

"Then Mr. Bradford doesn't need me," Elizabeth said.

Besides, she told herself, it was Sunday afternoon. Surely she was entitled to finish her weekend off. With Henry and Jill both aware of her return, the grapevine would be working overtime. No doubt Tom Bradford, up on the top floor, had already been told she was back. She smiled ruefully. Trying to sneak up on an employee at the Englin to observe his job performance was downright impossible.

She walked back into the big lobby. She wasn't ready to go up to the apartment yet, and she wasn't ready to go back to work. She just wanted a few minutes to reabsorb the atmosphere of the Englin. She forgot how much the hotel meant to her until she went away for a few days.

She stopped in front of the huge fireplace, the marble rubbed to a gleam. The fire was laid, ready to be lit if the evening was cool. It probably wouldn't be, even

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with the breeze coming off the lakefront, because it was August. But the fires were always ready.

It had been a weekend that brought back memories better left buried, she told herself, and wondered if she had been utterly stupid to go back to that little town in Wisconsin. She hadn't been there in five years, and she had been trying to exorcise a ghost by going back. Maybe if she saw the inn again, she had thought, she could get those memories uprooted and dispose of them as casually as she would discard last year's clothes. It hadn't worked that way, of course. If anything, the memories were stronger now. The little inn in Bridgedale had burned down years ago, and a factory now occupied the site. But the memories remained. In her mind, she supposed, it would always be summer in Bridgedale.

She sighed and walked slowly to the elevators. The express whisked her to the twenty-third floor, just one floor below the penthouses. There was a bit of bright-colored chintz fabric pulled loose inside the elevator car; Elizabeth added it to her mental list to talk to the maintenance department about. A luxury hotel charging luxury prices could not afford to look shabby in the least detail, especially when old-fashioned elegance was the strongest attraction to the patrons.

She let herself into the apartment with her key and sighed in relief when she saw the closed door of Myles' study. She wasn't capable of facing him right now; it would be hard enough to put on a good face for Florence, the housekeeper. She went down the hall to the kitchen.

Florence looked up as she came in. "Heard you were back," she said laconically.

"The Englin's grapevine never fails," Elizabeth said wryly, selecting a radish from the tray Florence was arranging. "Is Myles watching the baseball game on TV?"

"No. He has a guest."

"Oh." Elizabeth sat down on a stool at the breakfast bar. "I can think of things I'd rather do tonight than entertain. Or is it a stag party?" Her tone was hopeful.

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Florence shook her head. “He was asking just a few minutes ago if you were home yet. Said to tell you to dress casually.”

“Ha! Myles doesn’t know what the word means. Someday I’m going to take him literally and show up in blue jeans.”

“I wouldn’t do it tonight.” Florence put a tray of hors d’oeuvres in the oven. “And I didn’t know you owned any jeans.”

“Figuratively speaking, of course. Whom do we have the honor of entertaining?”

“I never saw the guy before. He’s a banker. Name’s Logan.” She began to slice celery.

Elizabeth’s hand clenched on the edge of the counter, the broad gold band on the ring finger cutting into her flesh. Then she forced herself to relax. “You were on vacation last time he was here. He’s an old friend of Myles’, but they don’t see each other very often. Filthy rich.”

“Going after him?”

“Are you kidding? Whit Logan is extremely married.”

Florence shrugged. “Just an idea.”

“Well, get rid of it. I’m not in the market for a husband.”

“Maybe you should be, Elizabeth.”

“Florence, it’s none of your business.”

Another shrug, but Florence changed the subject. “How did Jeremy like being left in Wisconsin?”

Elizabeth selected another radish. “He was out of the car before I could get it stopped, and from then on all I saw of Jeremy was a blur in the distance. He loves the country so much. I think he’d be delighted if we’d move up there.”

“How long did you tell me he’s staying?”

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“Tonya’s coming home this weekend so she has a couple of weeks to get Brian ready to start school. A week with two five-year-olds, and she’ll be ready for a break.”

The housekeeper eyed Elizabeth for a moment. “Tonya will take good care of him.”

“I know she will. It’s just that I said goodbye to him only four hours ago, and I’m already feeling lonely.”

Florence nodded. “It’s good for him, though. He’s too dependent on you. He needs a father, Elizabeth.”

“Florence, for the last time...” Words failed Elizabeth and she stalked out of the room. Chances were, if she had still been in the kitchen when her voice came back, she would have said something she’d really regret.

Instinct and mother-longing made her go into Jeremy’s room. It was unnaturally neat now; Florence must have cleaned it as soon as they had left on Friday. Usually Jeremy’s floor was populated with miniature soldiers, game pieces, and scraps of paper on which he was designing unknown new machinery. Like most five-year-olds, he thoroughly enjoyed clutter. The room didn’t look right with the bedspread pulled up straight and even, and the pillow flat instead of punched up into a wad.

She had said goodbye to him just hours before; surely she wasn’t such a clinging vine of a mother to be homesick for her son so quickly. Elizabeth prided herself on her independence, and she was trying to raise Jeremy to be self-sufficient, too. Florence was wrong when she said the child was dependent; yet it hurt Elizabeth when he didn’t seem to mind at all that he wouldn’t see her for a week.

“It’s because you’re a mother, dummy,” she told herself sternly. “And all mothers are known to go slightly bananas when their offspring start to grow up.” *If you think you’re bad now, she added silently, wait till he comes back and starts school. That will really throw your mind into a spin.*

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She sat down in the bentwood rocker she had used to rock him to sleep as an infant. Now, more often than not, the chair was his rocket to the stars, or his cow pony, or his fire engine.

Elizabeth absently turned the gold ring on her left hand. Was Florence right? Was Jeremy missing something vital because there were just the two of them? Myles loved the boy, but he was just too old to be much of a father figure. Especially since his last heart attack, his activity had been strictly limited, and Jeremy's boundless energy wore him out. Much of the time, he just didn't want to be bothered.

She suddenly became aware of the nervous habit of turning the ring endlessly, and stopped, remembering Jeremy's father. Would that frozen spot in her heart ever thaw? Would she ever be able to remember him without the sharp agony of loss?

"It's been years," she told herself firmly. Was Florence right? Should she think of marriage, for Jeremy's sake?

The answer came so quickly that she knew it was the right one. No. There were things that even the most loving mother would not do for her child. Marriage was one of them.

She picked up the shaker of goldfish food and fed the calico and the fantail which were swimming aimlessly around the aquarium. It was pure fancy to think that they missed Jeremy already, too, she told herself.

Florence had even removed the baseball cap which usually hung from the mirror on Jeremy's dresser. Feeling a little foolish, Elizabeth hunted in the closet until she found it, and put it back on the mirror at Jeremy's favorite angle. It seemed a promise to herself that the week would be shorter than she expected, and on Friday her boy would be home again.

Elizabeth detoured into the kitchen on her way to the big living room. "How do I look?" she asked Florence.

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“Turn round.”

Elizabeth obediently turned, the full skirt of the hostess dress whispering around her ankles. The dress was a tiny sprigged print of dark green on cream, the green the same shade as Elizabeth’s eyes. Her flaxen hair, the palest of golds, was arranged, in a knot on top of her head. Her entire appearance, precisely what Myles would call casual, would not have been out of place at any nightclub in the city.

“Nice,” Florence said. “Where did you buy that dress?”

“The bargain basement at Marshall Field,” Elizabeth teased.

“It’s good to see the sparkle back in your eyes.”

“I was just feeling a little silly about Jeremy being gone.”

“You do that every time he leaves the building.”

Elizabeth reached for a cracker. “Then I shouldn’t worry about it any more, should I?”

“No. Want to make yourself useful? Take in the appetizers.” Florence pushed a silver and crystal tiered tray across the counter.

“All right. When will dinner be ready?”

“Half an hour.”

“Do you suppose if this turns into a dead bore, I could develop a headache?”

“It might fool Mr. Logan. But you could surely come up with a better excuse for Mr. Englin.”

“I’ll work on it.”

Myles Englin was sitting in his favorite chair, and as she came into the room Elizabeth had eyes only for him. But his color was good, and he was smiling, and she breathed a quick sigh of relief. Whenever she left him, she was uncertain of what she would find on her return, especially since that last attack.

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She dropped a kiss on his cheek. “Would you like something to nibble on?” she asked. “Florence said dinner will be in half an hour.”

He took a tiny patty shell. “It’s good to have you home, Elizabeth,” he said. “You wouldn’t believe how lonely this place is without you.”

“With baseball season reaching fever pitch, you were probably so involved you didn’t even miss me,” she teased.

“Shows how much attention you pay to baseball, dear. The Cubs aren’t even close to a pennant. How can I get excited when my team is back in the pack? I’d like you to meet my guest. You remember Whit Logan, don’t you?”

“Of course,” Elizabeth said, and raised her head, for the first time looking at the man who had been pouring himself a drink, his back turned, when she came into the room. But this wasn’t Whit Logan ... that thick dark hair, those square broad shoulders could never have belonged to Whit Logan...

“This is Whit’s son Grady. Grady, my granddaughter, Elizabeth Englin.”

With a smile that hurt her mouth, Elizabeth extended her hand. “Mr. Logan,” she said. Her voice, to her own ears, sounded strained and cracked. “We enjoyed having your father visit us when he was in town a few months ago.”

Grady Logan took her hand and held it for an instant, dropping it so quickly it was an insult. His sapphire-blue eyes met her green ones, and Elizabeth didn’t flinch. In that split second she had regained her poise, learned well in five years of managing the hotel; not by the flicker of an eyelash did she betray her emotions as she moved to the bar and poured herself a glass of wine.

“May I call you Elizabeth? Or do you prefer something less formal? Betsy, for example?” The blue eyes were hard. Grady Logan took a long drink of his Scotch.

Elizabeth forced a laugh. *So the gloves are off, and the knives are coming out,* she thought. “Elizabeth will be fine, Mr. Logan. Or may I call you Grady? What brings you to Chicago?”

“I’m a vice-president of my father’s company now. I’ll be making Chicago my headquarters while I supervise all of the Logan banks in this part of the country.”

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Elizabeth speared an appetizer on a toothpick. “You must be very attached to your father,” she said sweetly.

Grady’s jaw set, and Elizabeth knew that her jibe had struck home. It would indeed be comfortable to be the son of Whit Logan. At least one would always have a job.

As long as one did what Daddy told you to, she added to herself. But if one didn’t obey ...

Grady might be a vice-president now, but she was willing to bet that the senior Mr. Logan still made the decisions.

Florence came in to announce dinner just then, and Myles set his glass down. “You two youngsters lead the way,” he said. “I’ll trail along behind. I’ve slowed down a lot, you know, Grady. After all, I’m seventy-five now, and not as healthy as I used to be. If I didn’t have Elizabeth here, the Englin would have been on the market long ago.”

Grady pulled Elizabeth’s hand through the crook of his arm. “I’m sure you must be very *attached* to her,” he said dryly.

At the table, Myles poured three glasses of wine, and when Elizabeth murmured a protest, he said, “Not even my doctor could be upset if I have a little wine to celebrate a happy occasion, Elizabeth.” He raised the glass. “To our new neighbor,” he said.

Elizabeth nearly choked. What did that mean? she wondered, then immediately assured herself that Myles meant only to welcome Grady to Chicago.

But before she could recover completely, he turned to her. “I don’t think I mentioned, Elizabeth, that Grady’s rented one of the penthouses.”

She murmured something indistinct and raised her wineglass again, remembering now what Jill had said about the penthouse suite being rented that afternoon. Grady Logan living one floor above her? How in God’s green earth was she to put up with that?

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“I’m sure we’ll be delighted to have you until you locate something permanent. Apartments in the city are hard to find just now, but...”

Grady’s blue eyes bored through her. “This is permanent, Elizabeth. I signed a year’s lease this afternoon.”

“Oh. I thought... Of course.... I’m sorry.”

Myles sent her a sharp look, and Elizabeth stared at her plate, hoping to dull his suspicion. Many of the penthouses were rented on a more or less permanent basis, but most of the tenants used them only infrequently. She should have been delighted that one was rented as a permanent apartment. She had better be careful or Myles would be more than just suspicious.

“I’m sure you’ll be happy there, Grady,” Myles said. “The Maxwell is a beautiful apartment.”

It would have to be the Maxwell that he’d rented, Elizabeth told herself bitterly. The Maxwell was her favorite, the first of the penthouses to get a full remodeling and decorating. Elizabeth had chosen the colors and furnishings from carpet to chandeliers within the last six months. And now its first long-term tenant was to be Grady Logan. It was too ironic to bear.

But surely, after finding out that she was here, he would want to break that lease. Elizabeth made a mental note to call the hotel’s attorney first thing in the morning. Alan was a good friend as well as a crack lawyer, and he had helped her out of scrapes before. He would be able to tell her what to do. She would make it as easy for Grady as she could. She’d swear he’d had as big a shock there in the drawing room as she had.

Myles spent the rest of the dinner hour telling Grady about Elizabeth’s plans to convert all of the larger suites into apartments. He tried to draw her into the conversation, but Elizabeth refused to cooperate.

“It’s a brilliant notion, really,” Myles said. “With rentals scarce and prices high along the whole lakeshore, plus the newer luxury hotels taking over a lot of the market for big suites, we can settle for a little lower price but end up with a steadier return.”

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“Is the Englin still so popular with the celebrities?”

“Are you hoping to run into movie starlets in the elevator?” Elizabeth asked, and immediately regretted it.

Grady answered, “No,” and his level gaze told Elizabeth that if she didn’t want to accept the consequences she had better watch what she said.

Myles said, “No, they’ve moved on up the street. At least the younger ones have. We still have some who are faithful. That’s one of the reasons you’ll find it so peaceful up there. Some of the suites are empty, waiting to be refurnished, and most of the rest are rented to people who use them only a few times a year.”

“Did you ever think of selling the hotel?”

“Oh, yes. I’d hate to, though we have divested ourselves of the rest of the chain. There were fifteen Englins, you know, in my younger days. They stretched from California to the Caribbean.” He sighed. “But after my heart attacks, my doctor wouldn’t hear of me traveling enough to manage them all. And Elizabeth couldn’t handle everything, so we had no choice. But this one was the original Englin, and she loves it as much as I do. No, we won’t let go of this one.”

Grady didn’t say anything, but Elizabeth could almost hear the cynical bite of the words he was longing to say. She just smiled sweetly at him and wondered what he was going to do with a ten-room apartment. The Maxwell had four bedrooms. Maybe he was planning to move in with a harem. Or maybe Papa Logan had come up with an approved girl, and Grady was raising a family of miniature bankers. The thought made her stomach ache.

It was hard to reconcile the amiable though hard-headed businessman Whit Logan, who had even condescended to notice Jeremy on his last visit, with the patriarch who kept his son under his thumb. Maybe she had misread the man when he had visited. Heaven knew it was easy enough to put on a charming face for an evening. Or perhaps she had overestimated the control he had over Grady? No, she told herself. There had been no doubt left about that.

“Elizabeth!” Myles said.

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Elizabeth jumped. She had been staring into her coffee cup, wondering absently if Grady was married and what his wife was like. She looked up at Myles.

“What’s the matter with you tonight, dear? I merely suggested you take Grady down to the Library Lounge for an Irish coffee. I know I must be boring you to death, Grady. Nothing worse than telling a banker all of your financial plans, unless it’s asking a doctor to diagnose your gall bladder problem at a cocktail party.”

Grady grinned. “Not at all, Myles. But I couldn’t turn down the Irish coffee.” He reached for Elizabeth’s elbow.

“Be sure the waitress puts it on my tab, Elizabeth,” Myles said. “Goodnight, now.”

Elizabeth started to protest, but the hand on her arm tightened warningly. “All right, all right,” she said, and led the way out of the apartment.